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DOI:

[10.1080/09654313.2015.1104815](https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1104815)

Document Version

Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Clifton, N., Comunian, R., & Chapain, C. (2015). Creative Regions in Europe: Challenges and Opportunities for Policy. *European Planning Studies*, 23(12), 2331-2335. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2015.1104815>

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Introduction to Special Issue on “Creative Regions in Europe: challenges and opportunities for policy”

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The shift towards neoliberal policy-making as orthodoxy has been well documented within the field of regional development and beyond (Brenner et al, 2012; Boland, 2014; Haughton et al, 2013), exemplified by a focus on growth and the benchmarking of competitiveness via policies emphasising competitive bidding, attracting potential ‘customers’ (companies, tourists, mobile knowledge workers), urban planning involving spaces for consumption, recreation, cultural events, nightlife and artistic districts, plus high quality residential areas (for a comprehensive review see Sager, 2011). Many regions have thus adopted the standard suite of neoliberal development policies in a more or less off-the-shelf fashion. Moreover, this policy-making agenda implicitly incorporates (and indeed often conflates) elements of cultural and creative industries, the creative class and so on, which are typically employed without due consideration of context (Chapain and Comunian, 2010; Clifton et al, 2013), or indeed the more subtle aspects of the underlying drivers (Clifton, 2008). While previous reviews have considered whether there is evidence for a European perspective in relation to creative industries and the associated policy frameworks (Comunian et al 2014), and examined the discontinuities and commonalities between different spatial scales of analysis (Chapain et al, 2013) there is a need to unpack the role of creativity within the prevailing policy-making climate described above. More generally, what is the broader meaning therein of ‘attractive places’ with regard to their external projection to the wider world (Clifton, 2014)?

The aim of this Special Issue is thus to present and critically discuss approaches that address and potentially overcome these current shortcomings. Accordingly, some of the key issues raised are within the contributions are:

1. How do might we reconcile the notions of the cultural and the economic? What is the relationship between creative workers and creative cities in these different contexts?
2. How are creative workers and individuals shaping the dynamics of creative production and local development? How do cultural and creative industries share and support the image of cities and

localities and their possibility to retain and engage citizens, as well as developing the visitor economy?

3. What role does the concentration of creatives play at different geographical scales and contexts? For example, how do these concentrations work in small towns and rural contexts versus the more traditional larger city perspectives?
4. What is the role of local and regional policies and policy frameworks and what are the best practices / lessons emerging in different European contexts? Are there any geographical patterns emerging linked to national policy contexts (liberal, interventionist, federal, central states...)?

This special issue features eight research papers, split evenly with regard to geographical focus between the UK and continental Europe (the latter covering Spain, Germany, France, Luxemburg and Belgium individually and in combination). There is also a similar division in terms of those focussing primarily on the policy level (the papers of Clifton and Macaulay, Mould and Comunian, Pareja-Eastaway and Pradel i Miquel, Perrin) and those of the individual creative actor (the papers of Alfken et al, Bennett et al, Wedemeier, and Brown). There is also diversity within the UK- focused papers.

The first of these, by Julie Brown, provides a micro-level, qualitative analysis of the motivations, experiences and migration trajectories of a subset set of the creative class working in the Music and Visual & Performing Arts sector in the city of Birmingham, UK. Birmingham represents an example of a European 'second tier' city emulating 'creative city' policies, and one that is potentially well-placed to attract international talent due to its culturally diverse population and reputation for tolerance. Overall she finds clear evidence that the migration decisions of such people in reality depend on a much broader range of factors other than simply quality of place or diversity and tolerance. These are typically related to higher education and personal and career development opportunities; thus she suggests that policies focusing on subjective concepts of place attractiveness are unlikely to be successful. Rather, cities need more carefully targeted policies that address their particular socio-economic and physical realities. On the theme of policy, Oli Mould and Roberta Comunian's contribution focuses on that of developing 'cultural quarters'; over the last two decades, these have been used by many local authorities across the UK in an attempt to redevelop and revitalise declining urban centres. They describe how in many cases visitor numbers remain lower than expected, and in some extreme examples flagship projects have been sold off or closed down. Framed within the wider debate as to the role of creativity in urban regeneration and the apparent

contradiction between artistic merit and commercial viability, they argue that there is a need for a more practiced-based, subjective account of the cultural quarter paradigm.

The neo-liberal economic development policies outlined in Mould and Comunians's paper are almost ubiquitous in their emphasis on translating creativity into competitive outcomes. However context is often a neglected factor in such debates. To this end Nick Clifton and Tony Macaulay consider what an appropriate policy agenda might be within what they refer to as a 'Post-Conflict' society - i.e. a place which has recently experienced significant levels of social unrest and/or political violence, which has now largely ceased but whose legacy remains. Using the illustrative case of Northern Ireland in the UK, they argue that present policy which appears to regard social cohesion, tolerance and diversity largely as by-products of aspired-to economic success rather than potential contributory factors towards it represents a missed opportunity both in terms of attracting and retaining mobile creatives within Northern Ireland, and unleashing as yet untapped pools of creativity within its society. The paper by Sophie Bennett, Steven McGuire, and Rachel Rahman also considers creative workers in a particular context – in this case the rural. They addresses the issue as to why the presence of creatives in peripheral regions does not necessarily lead to economic development outcomes therein. Employing a survey of micro and small craft enterprises in Mid and West Wales (UK), they attribute this finding to the observed mis-match between government-lead business development incentives, and the bohemian values of local enterprises. They suggest that policies formulated on the basis of an urban creative development model are therefore likely to have limited relevance in rural places, where creative employment is typically skewed towards art and craft activity.

Shifting geographical focus to Europe, Montserrat Pareja-Eastaway and Marc Pradel i Miquel present a comparative analysis of four Spanish cities: Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, and Valencia, which explores the issues of path dependency and policy transferability with regard to the creative economy. Cities have different historical paths to industrialisation and modernisation, which play out in combination with their own set of actors and economic traditions. Thus these authors outline different forms of transition towards the creative economy. However, like a number of other Spanish cities, the four case-study cities developed ambitious policies and programmes to foster the creative economy in the context of economic expansion largely driven by real estate development. Now in the context of the post-crisis recession such initiatives require a critical reassessment. Shifting the policy focus from cities to regions, the paper of Thomas Perrin discusses creative and cultural policies that are developed on a cross-border scale, via a comparative case study of the

Pyrenees-Mediterranean 'Euroregion', located on the French-Spanish eastern border and the 'Greater Region' between Luxembourg, Germany, Belgium and France. He focuses on uses of culture, identity and creative resources in strategies of territorial attractiveness and institutional capacity-building. As a result these dynamics underline the contribution of cultural policy to the construction of territoriality, and subsequently the contribution of Euroregions to the territorial and cultural construction of Europe. In this way he suggests, one of the main challenges of the 'Creative Euroregions' is to advocate European construction and cultural diversity, while preserving regional identities and sub-state prerogatives.

The special issue concludes with two papers examining the geography of creativity in Germany. The paper by Christoph Alfken, Tom Broekel, and Rolf Sternberg contributes to the on-going debate regarding the relative importance of economic and amenity-related factors for attracting talent - more specifically members of the creative class. Unlike many researchers in the field who are limited by the availability of cross-sectional data, they are able to employ panel data to address this questions. The paper explores the concentration of artists across 412 German regions over a 4 year period; amenity-related factors are largely found to fail to explain the agglomeration processes of artists, while in contrast their results clearly confirm the relevance of economic factors which are central in the literature on regional productions systems, local labour markets and externalities. Moreover, artists are shown to be a heterogeneous group as the relative importance of regional factors significantly differs between artist groupings (in this case visual artists, performing artists, musicians, and writers). Finally, in research complementing that of Alfken et al, Jan Wedemeier provides an analysis of the impact of the wider creative sector (not just restricted to artists more also incorporating the broader creative class) on the total employment and on the creative sector's employment growth in Western German regions from 1977 to 2004. He finds that large shares of creative sector employment lead to an increase in the total employment of a region, but this this also reduces the growth rate of this employment group. As with the former effect outweighs the latter, this means convergence in creative professionals' employment between regions is observed. In contrast to Alfken et al however Wedemeier finds that amenities do play a role in explaining the attraction of creatives- albeit with regard to a narrow definition thereof- i.e. amenities proxied by the presence of bohemian occupations in the locality.

Acknowledgements

The eight papers featured in this special issue arose out of work originally presented (in its formative stages) at a number 'Creative Regions' research seminars; these were co-organised by the three co-

authors of this special issue, and sponsored by the Regional Studies Association, to whom we are grateful for their support.

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